

Amendments to the Claims:

1-10 (canceled)

11. (previously presented) A method of printing postal indicia on a plurality of mail items, said postal indicia including postage data and an authentication code, including the steps of:

storing a secret key;

determining a period of time in which postal indicia are to be printed on a plurality of mail items;

storing a postage value relating to postage charges dispensed in said period of time;

providing postage data including said postage value;

generating a modified key relating specifically to a mail item by utilizing said secret key and said postage data;

generating an authentication code by utilizing said modified key and said postage data; and

printing said postage data and said authentication code as a postal indicium on said mail item.

12. (previously presented) Postage meter apparatus for printing postal indicia on a plurality of mail items, said postal indicia including postage data and an authentication code, including:

clock means operative to determine a period of time in which postal indicia are to be printed on a plurality of mail items;

a register for storing a postage value relating to postage charges dispensed in said period of time;

memory means for storing a secret key;

electronic control means; and

input means operable to input item data relating to a mail item to said electronic control means;

wherein said electronic control means is configured to generate a modified key relating specifically to said mail item by utilizing said secret key and postage data including said item data and said postage value, and generate an authentication code by utilizing said modified key and said postage data.

13. (previously presented) Postage meter apparatus as claimed in claim 12, including:
  - a further register for storing a value of credit;
  - and wherein said postage data includes said value of credit.